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OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
REPORTED INCOMPETENCY OF THE "GINS"
OR

ABORIGINAL FEMALES OF NEW HOLLAND,
TO PROCREATE WITH A NATIVE MALE AFTER HAVING BORNE
HALF-CASTE CHILDREN TO A EUROPEAN OR WHITE.

By T. R. H. THOMSON, M.D., Surgeon R.N., formerly of the
"Niger Expedition."

Read November 10th, 1852.

FEW statements were ever received with greater astonishment by ethnologists and physiologists than one made by Count Strzlecki, some years ago, in a work published by him on the physical history of New South Wales, to the effect that once a female of the aboriginal race has borne a child to a European or white, she ceases entirely to reproduce with males of her own race, or, in other words, is henceforth infecundate to all except the former.

A statement so utterly inconsistent with all the known facts connected with the history of the human species induced me, during a sojourn in New South Wales in 1849, to make very particular inquiries, both from natives and settlers of acknowledged veracity and observation, as to the tenability of this extraordinary assertion; but while I am obliged to say that all I could ascertain was quite inconsistent with it, I must also admit the deep research and general accuracy of the learned traveller from whom it emanated. On informing some of the Wyong natives and others of Hunter River that this to-be-acquired sterility of their "gins" had been reported, they all regarded it with derision, assuring me they had known it to occur repeatedly in their own and other tribes for native women to bear children to their black husbands or companions, after having borne offspring to Europeans; which affirmation they accompanied with remarks in

the peculiar jargon used by them in communicating with the white man, neither complimentary to the distinguished individual whose name was connected with it, or my humble self who repeated it. Mr. Coulson, also, whose knowledge of the Moreton-Bay blacks is very considerable, expressed much astonishment on hearing it, and likewise informed me he had known many cases among the King-Bar tribes, the Lady Plains, and Logan tribes, where the gins, or native women, had borne perfectly black children to native males, after having cohabited with and produced half-caste children by European squatters or settlers. This was also confirmed by other respectable settlers, some of whom, out of respect to Count Strzlecki, did not wish to have their names mentioned, but who altogether repudiated what had been said on the subject by that traveller.

There is now residing here (near Douglas, Isle of Man) an intelligent settler, Mr. Hay, who recently returned from Australia, after living fourteen years near several of the Macquarrie-River tribes, and he, too, informs me that the statement in question is quite erroneous, and could only have been imposed on its author by some ill-informed persons; for that a black gin, or female, at his station on the Macquarrie River, about 250 miles from Sidney, had a copper-coloured child by a European servant of a neighbouring station, and she afterwards returned to her own husband and tribe, and had a perfectly black child, without any European trace; and Mr. Hay saw the mother at his station just before he left there, not more than eight months ago, and with her the elder or copper-coloured child, and the younger or thoroughbred Australian. He says further, that he could have no difficulty in adding several other similar cases, but such "a startling fact" had not reached him while in New South Wales, or he would have collected abundance of evidence to refute it.

That the native women, or gins, should sometimes become sterile after a period of concubinage with a European is not denied by me; nor is such to be wondered at, when we take into consideration the change of life which follows on a gin placing herself under the roof of a European settler.

From living in a state of nature, with irregular and uncertain diet, exposed to every vicissitude of climate with no other covering than a scrap of opossum skin, or a little "tulka," or tea-tree bark, she enters on a more regular life, partakes of regular meals, and sleeps no longer exposed; but even with all these alterations for the better she does not bear to the white man more prolifically than she would to her native husband: on the contrary, her fecundity appears to decrease; for, in partaking of the white man's comforts, she is too often the recipient of his vices. Much of her time is passed in smoking tobacco and drinking to intoxication ardent spirits, where they are procurable. Indeed, it is well known that one of the chief inducements for the native women to remain with Europeans is the rum with which they are supplied *ad libitum*. Can we, then, be surprised, if, after some years spent in a manner which must militate more against her capabilities for procreating than her previous mode of life, she returns to her tribe with a broken-down constitution, probably past the usual term of life for conception (as they seldom bear children after thirty), to prove, in some instances, sterile. We readily admit, that wherever our settlers are commingled with the Aborigines in the bush, the native race disappears, and partly from the infecundity of the gins: this, however, does not arise from any deviation of nature's laws, as it is attempted to be proved, but because the European, wherever he takes his civilization, takes with him his vices also; and the enervated, miserable Aborigines (scarcely ever sober), noticed by the traveller too commonly around the settlements in the bush, afford tolerably good evidence of the causes of decline in the native tribes. The further they are in the bush the longer they hold their ground: the nearer the town and the grog-shop, the quicker they are swept off.

Small-pox, too, has lent its aid, in many tribes, to extinguish them, under the name of "Dunna-dunna." Mr. Hay met with it among some of the Macquarrie-River natives, and some retained unequivocal marks of its having visited them, although it has been denied by some writers.

Another sad cause of their gradual extinction is the disposition on the part of the gins to get rid of the trouble of

ending and carrying about their offspring, and which is now too frequently done by destroying them. A native woman, knowing it will please her European keeper to preserve the fruits of their intercourse, will do so, as her duties are light; but on leaving the white man, and joining her tribe, should she become pregnant by a native, will she (harshly used, indifferently fed, and obliged to travel about hunting and fishing at the caprice of her companions) trouble herself much about her helpless burden? It is not to be expected she will; and every inquiry now proves that one great cause of extermination is infanticide.

As well might Count Strzlecki, or any other authority, refer to the cause he assigns for it in Australia the gradual disappearance of some of the South-American tribes after Pizarro's invasion, or of the North-American tribes since the United States has sent her pioneers into the far West, as to do so in the case of the Aborigines of New South Wales.

We all know that many tribes of both North and South-American Indians are extinct, and that, in the gradual disappearance of such races, there is a degree of infecundity connected with their decline, and with the advances, of civilized life into their distant prairies; but it resulted not from any deviation to nature's laws, such as Count Strzlecki offers; it was by the diseases, the altered habits, the enervating and depraving vices which the white man takes with him when he goes forth to seek a new home in the land of savages.

That the various races of mankind can commingle and procreate without losing the capability of reproducing again with their peculiar division of the human species, is abundantly proven wherever the European has turned his steps. Let it be North or South America, India, Africa, Japan, China, Polynesia—the traveller will find the half-caste, the mulatto, the creole, too often the elder brother of the jet black, the brown, the olive, unmixed younger children, to confirm what is now asserted confidently to hold good of the Aborigines of New Holland.

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1, *Mona Terrace, Douglas, Isle of Man*,
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